

Bearing Witness to Genocide

By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Fellow Kansan, Dwight Eisenhower, served our country during a time when human dignity and human life needed defending. After visiting a concentration camp at the end of World War II he said, "The things I saw beggar description...the visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering." Last week was "Days of Remembrance," a time designated by Congress to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. I visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. to see the collection of images and read the stories of death and dehumanization that took place 60 years ago. I returned to hear President Bush speak about how the Jewish people suffered and about the importance of addressing genocide and death today in Darfur, Sudan.

As co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I recently joined the House Majority Leader in a visit to Darfur. While there, we met with government officials and relief workers and saw the conditions that human beings are living in today. Since the beginning of this conflict in February 2003, four hundred and fifty thousand people have been killed and more than two million citizens have been displaced from their homes and villages. Thousands of people are without food and water and are dependent on relief organizations for survival.

This trip made me aware of a level of human suffering that no meeting, no television news story and no book could. One cannot visit Darfur and not be changed by seeing the results of a government that allows violence, hunger, disease and dislocation to be used as a weapon against its own people. It was an opportunity to see that we all have a cause to make sure that life prevails and justice endures. It is something that demands our attention. We as a country and we as a world must come together to bring death and destruction, inhumanity, hunger and violence to an end.

At the Holocaust Museum, I saw the quote from Isaiah 43:10 that says, "You are my witness." Today we are witnessing a new genocide. As I reflected on the past and considered the future of Africans in Darfur, I have to ask - are we going to wait until the proportions of death are similar to the Holocaust before we take action?

The exhibit that moved me the most was the list of 10,000 individuals who took action during the Holocaust. They have been identified by the Israelis as "the Righteous Among the Nations," those who risked their lives to save innocent Jews during Nazi rule. When the conflict in Darfur has ended, everyone will feel sorrow for the unnecessary loss of life. But will we as individuals and we as a nation be among those who feel shame for inaction or pride for standing up for justice in Darfur? Today we must rise up to be a new righteous force so that our children and grandchildren remember us not as a generation that turned their heads, but one that banded together to bring an end to the senseless pain and suffering afflicted upon the people of Darfur.